

Technical assistance - the great adventure of our time

Autor(en): [s.n.]

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - (1963)

Heft 1434

PDF erstellt am: **27.06.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-692858>

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The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED IN 1919 BY PAUL F. BOEHRINGER.

The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain

Advisory Council: R. J. KELLER (Chairman), GOTTFRIED KELLER (Vice-Chairman), DR. E. M. BIRCHER, O. F. BOEHRINGER, J. EUSEBIO, A. KUNZ, A. STAUFFER, G. E. SUTER.

EDITED BY MRS. MARIANN MEIER WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF MEMBERS OF THE SWISS COLONY IN GREAT BRITAIN

Telephone: CLERKENWELL 2321/2.

Published Twice Monthly at 23, LEONARD STREET, E.C.2.

Telegrams: FREPRINCO, LONDON.

Vol. 49. No. 1434

FRIDAY. 28th JUNE 1963

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE — THE GREAT ADVENTURE OF OUR TIME

One of the gravest problems with which Twentieth Century Man is confronted is how to enable the greater part of the human race to benefit from the economic and social progress now taken for granted by a majority of nations. Probably half of mankind is permanently hungry. Perhaps two-thirds are illiterate, miserably poor and with a life expectancy of under thirty years. Since the second world war many governments have launched far-reaching campaigns against poverty, disease and ignorance. Such vast economic and social problems cannot be solved unaided, and the United Nations General Assembly decided in 1949 to launch a Technical Assistance programme. Participating in this are the United Nations itself and seven Specialised Agencies. Governments have accepted the principle that in the interests, not only of their own countries but of world stability and peace, they must undertake mutual aid for economic and social development. The object of Technical Assistance provided by the United Nations is to help governments in the great task of raising living standards. Governments are responsible for deciding what Technical Assistance they require and for submitting the necessary requests for experts or fellowships. This they do by examining their national development programmes and deciding upon the most urgent needs. Early each year the Technical Assistance Board (TAB) informs governments of the approximate sum available in each particular country.

Both experts and fellows come from all parts of the globe. Experts are sent out into other countries to advise, and teach and train others on the spot, while fellows study abroad the latest developments or specialised techniques in their own field. The activities of the fellows are as diverse as those of the experts, and there is a deliberate link between the experience brought by experts from outside a country and that acquired by nationals of a country training and studying abroad as United Nations fellows. In practice the results of Technical Assistance benefit even nations with a high economic standard, and many of the countries receiving help also provide experts (a small example is Korea which has lent one of the greatest veterinary surgeons working for Technical Assistance in other countries).

Technical Assistance through United Nations and its agencies represents only a fraction of the whole, and other organisations (such as U.S. Point IV Program, the Colombo Plan, etc.) are engaged in similar projects. Many independent firms and groups in individual countries work on schemes which have the same aim and result, namely to help the economically less fortunate to help themselves.

In June 1961 the Swiss Parliament granted a credit of 60 million francs for Technical Assistance over a period of three years. The start was slow as many were the problems

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which had to be studied. But in 1962 the work increased considerably and 12 million Swiss francs were spent by the Confederation. Two-thirds of this money went on contributions to the enlarged U.N. programme of T.A. Another Fr.800,000. — were spent on schemes by UNESCO, FAO, WHO, etc.; 2.3 million were needed for the bilateral schemes of the Confederation. Of these, individual scholarships used half a million, 0.9 million subsidised training courses in Switzerland, and 0.6 million were used on commissions of experts and delivery of material. Another million went by way of contributions to Swiss organisations.

It would go too far to describe all of these. Suffice it to mention just a few. There is the "Schweizer Ausland Hilfe" (Swiss foreign aid), "SHAG" (Swiss relief for non-European areas), the Institute of International Study in Geneva, the Swiss Tropical Institute in Basle.

Early this year the former Ambassador in the U.S.A., Dr. August Lindt, was appointed Delegate for Technical Co-operation at the Federal Political Department. As former Observer at U.N., President of the Executive Council of UNICEF, as High Commissioner for Refugees, Minister Lindt has invaluable experience to help him in this important task. The considerable expansion of Swiss development aid has necessitated a further enlargement of the Delegate's staff which now amounts to 40 members.

The various projects need careful scrutiny; all aspects — financial, economic, practical and political — have to be examined and close co-operation is maintained with various Federal and Cantonal departments, administrations and private interested parties. Co-ordination is essential.

There is an annual conference dealing with problems of T.A. under the chairmanship of the Swiss Foreign Minister, and there is a Commission on Technical Assistance which meets frequently with its chairman, Prof. H. Gutersonn, head of the Geographical Institute of the Swiss University of Technology.

There is also a Swiss Foundation for Technical Development Assistance which was created by Swiss industries.

At the Conference on the use of science and technology in aid of developing countries arranged by the United Nations in January, Switzerland was represented by a strong delegation of politicians, scientists and technical experts.

Expert commissions combined with the necessary delivery of material are considered one of the most effective means to give immediate and practical help to the individual underdeveloped countries. In 1962 Switzerland put 149 specialists (80 in 1961) at the disposal of international organisations or sent them directly to the countries in question. The lack of personnel and the economic boom in Switzerland have made a wider support difficult.

Another 27 experts were sent out which brought the total on bilateral schemes to 29 (in Africa 19, in Asia 6, Europe 2, and Latin America 2).

A further 87 Swiss experts were put at the disposal of United Nations Organisation and its Specialised Agencies on a multilateral basis. Altogether 95 were in Africa, 15 in Asia, 3 in Europe, and 7 in Latin America — a total of 120 by the end of 1962.

Amongst the experts are technicians and commercial experts, doctors, geologists, economists, teachers, agronomists, accountants, a hydrologist in the Sudan, a leather expert in Colombia, surveyors in Burundi, an expert on telegraphy in Togo, representatives of the hotel and travel industry in Trinidad and Algeria — there is no end to the interesting tasks which are undertaken by Swiss men and women; even policemen have been sent: United Nations have charged the chief of the security police in the Valais and a Vaudois police commissioner with special duties in the Congo.

Material which was sent included 17 cases of demonstration kits for the Congo and Cameroon, theodolite for Senegal, India and Nepal, tools for wood cutting and wood work to Nigeria — at a total cost of nearly Fr.120,000.

In addition, numerous private Swiss organisations are working in the field of Technical Assistance. The Confederation supported these schemes in every way. One of the most important is the Nepal Project, which was started eight years ago. Its aim was to help the countryside rather than towns like Katmandu. In the Jiri Valley an area was drained and made arable. The development project supported by "SHAG" includes dairy farming, medical training and nursing, as well as a mechanics' instruction centre, bridge building, forestry and power production.

The Catholic Mission of Lucerne works a scheme in India, that of the Uznach Benedictines runs a project in Tanganyika, and the Sister Congregation of Menzingen is in charge of the "Holy Cross" hospital and training centre in an extremely densely populated part of Kerala in South India.

The VSK, the central organisation of Swiss co-operatives runs a considerable project in the small Republic of Dahomey. This has just over two million inhabitants and covers an area of 116,000 square metres, of which 80% is agrarian. In October 1961 the VSK chose Dahomey for its T.A. project with the aim of giving assistance on a co-operative basis. The 750,000 members of the VSK renounced one-hundredth of the dividend to be repaid and the 23,000 members of their staff contributed one hour's pay per quarter. Thus, within a year one million francs have been collected. In 1961 a seminar was started to establish contacts. From May to October 1962 future leaders of the five projected agricultural co-operative societies in Dahomey took part in a practical course in Switzerland before returning to their own country. A Swiss expert on the spot was found essential, as apart from a great deal of good will there was also a certain lack of self-discipline. In addition, consignments of materials were sent out, including tractors. A Swiss agronomist engineer lives in Dahomey permanently and the U.N. Technical Assistance Bureau is also in the charge of a Swiss. The project is working very well, and it is hoped that in the next five years school, saving, credit, women's and trade co-operatives will be established.

Recently the Confederation has decided to give large grants to a Swiss agricultural college in Misiones in Argentina, towards the enlargement of an agricultural college in Tanganyika and for an agricultural and domestic training centre in Chile.

The Municipal Council of Zurich subsidises a technical training scheme in Kerala (India) which is run by the relief work of the Swiss evangelical churches, "HEKS", in conjunction with the oldest Christian church in India. Zurich also gave financial support to an agricultural school in Casablanca.

The Turkish Handicrafts Association, representing some 20,000 small concerns not exceeding five workers, had decided to build a 250-bed hospital in Istanbul for its members. This project having come up against serious difficulties, particularly in regard to sanitary installations, the Swiss Association of Master Tinsmiths and Fitters last year decided, in agreement with the corresponding workers' associations and suppliers concerned, to supply the necessary fittings and to install them on the spot. This act of professional solidarity on an international scale involving some S.Fr.200,000 deserves to be mentioned.

Switzerland has a proportionately large share in scholarship holders trained in Europe. The trend towards group scholarships is on the up grade, as this type of training has been found more beneficial than individual scholarships. A number of such courses started in 1961 were finished in 1962, some ran completely last year and others started in 1962 which are still running now. Fifteen courses were held by the Confederation with a total of 370 scholars from 40 developing countries, mainly from Asia and Africa.

At the end of 1962, 183 bilateral scholarship fellows were in Switzerland from 32 countries. In addition, 156 scholarships were granted by the Swiss Department of Home Affairs. If most of the scholarships received in Switzerland have been granted to the Afro-Asian bloc and Latin America has been somewhat neglected, this is mainly due to language difficulties.

In February a new school was inaugurated in Fribourg which is to house 150 students from developing countries and which is financed by the Confederation. At this school their education will be completed so that they are able to enter Swiss universities. Early in June the Swiss Department for Home Affairs organised the annual meeting of foreign holders of scholarships at Swiss universities, at present 180, a figure which will increase to 250 by next year.

In May a first course arranged by the Confederation through the PTT, the Post, Telephone and Telegraph Department, was opened at Vevey. Fifteen Africans from the Congo, Guinea and Mali are being trained in a five months' course in postal administration.

Swiss Technical Assistance is being given on a very considerable scale. The whole question needs constant study in order to make the help most effective and to prevent any waste. It was stated at the UNO Conference in Geneva early this year that several milliards of francs from many nations had been lost in developing countries because of lack of co-ordination and insufficient preparations. Therefore it is most important that the recipient is trained from the beginning to take responsibility. Switzerland will more and more transfer training and instruction into the receiving country, which eliminates many difficulties that scholarship fellows meet when suddenly confronted with occidental civilisation.

The best help to the developing countries is that which becomes superfluous as quickly as possible, for that is when the country that has received assistance can cope alone; it has learned to help itself and the helper can safely retire.

(Based on reports received by courtesy of Agence Télégraphique Suisse, OSEC, and on a report on T.A. from Associated Country Women of the World.)